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Thoughts for the Christmas Morning

By Cyrus Townsend Brady

"Blow, bugles of battle, the marches of peace;
East, west, north and south let the long quarrels cease.
Sing the song of great joy that the angels began,
Sing of glory to God and of good-will to man."

MORN is on its verge on the Bethlehem hills. The shepherds in the fields have watched their flocks through the long night, when to the ever recurrent miracle of a new day is added another manifestation of Power Divine. As the dawn lightens the east, the men become aware of a marvelous vision. An angelic host floats above them. They fill the heavens with light and song, and through them is vouchsafed not the least of those revelations which assure us that "God's in His heaven. All's right with the world!"

"Glory to God in the highest," they sing, "and on earth peace, good-will toward men."

The old earth has been spinning "down the ringing grooves of change" for God knows how many centuries, and in their dim, dumb way men had worshipped some power above them since "the first man stood God conquer'd with His face to heaven upturned," without realizing the truth revealed in that message, that the service of man for man is the worship of man for God, and that there is more merit in the Divine sight in one kindly act, one moment of self-sacrifice, than in a thousand meaningless songs of praise.

Nearly two milleniums have sped since that message, and the world has even yet but half learned the lesson. Yet there has been progress, and in that progress lies our hope. The world to-day does not permit Christmas to pass unnoticed. Putting aside questions of doctrine, of theology, we may recall one fact, to-day, as yesterday, the kings and the peasants, the gentle and the simple, the wise and the ignorant, center their eyes upon a Babe in a Manger. To-day the world waits in silence to hear those angels sing. To-day, if on no other day, men listen, pause and heed. Whatever may be thought of His claims, of His teachings, at least Jesus is the dominant figure in the world on Christmas Day. To-day the rudest and the roughest, the most irreverent and the most indifferent, look with awe on that sublime spectacle, a mother and her newborn child; look with a touch of reverence which none is so low that he may not feel. The clamor of the world is still. Its strife is hushed. 'Tis Christmas morning once again, and we are as little children by a cradle, which, though shadowed by a future cross, 's become a shrine—a throne.

There was an ancient custom in the days when the right of private war was zealously maintained, that all quarrels should be held in abeyance during the Christmas season. A "Truce of God" was proclaimed by the Holy Church, and he who broke it, for whatsoever cause, was deemed a recreant to his manhood and to his religion. The custom fell into disuse, but it has come back again. For one day at least there is peace and good-will among men. That there should be even one day when such principles obtain is a reason for great congratulation. That there should be but one day is a cause for profound sadness.

Our religion is too often assumed at the church door and put off at the benediction on one day of the week. Just so the spirit of peace and good-will of the Christmaside comes, like Christmas itself, but once a year. It is slipped on like a new and uncomfortable garment, worn for a day, and before we have become accustomed to it, it is cast aside and forgotten. The day after, we awake as we were before. The interlude of comity and kindness has made no change.

"We ring the bells and we raise the strain,

We hang up garlands ever where,
And bid the tapers twinkle fair,
And feast and frolic—and then we go
Back to the same old lives again."

On certain days in Latin-American countries the people have religious representations and processions in which the parts of the saints are assumed by the men of the present. There is an alleged humorous story that one of these for the moment filled the place of an ancient worthy in whose honor the demonstration was



being made. Finding himself angered by the conduct of one of the spectators, in his wrath he shouted to the offender to wait until, he, the speaker, got through playing the saint, and due punishment would be meted out to him! There is more of sadness than of laughter in the story. We are all "playing the saint" on Christmas Day. "Just wait till we get through."

And this brings us to the dominant thought of this little Christmas preachment, our spasmodic compliance with the great command of the angelic song, our intermittent observance of the spirit of Christmas. This, then, is a plea that it may not be for a day only, and that it may not be for children only that we keep the great holiday of the world, with peace on earth and good-will toward men.

It is natural that we should wish that joy might be unalloyed on this day, and it is indubitable that unalloyed joy may be had only by those who are beginning life, not by those who have experienced its troubles; therefore the spirit of Christmas, which is to commemorate the birth of a Child, finds its sweetest manifestation in the verdant heart, the youthful mind, the happiness of children.

As for ourselves, there is ever a touch of sadness in our glee. We twine the cypress with the laurel. The mind goes back to other days when we were children; we recall those no longer here we fain would see again. The vanished hand is extended on each recurring anniversary, the longing for the still voice deepens ever. But it is not so with our children. There are no clouds upon their sunshine. Let us make them happy. But is that all? Can we do more?

Are there no little children beside those whose feet patter through our own halls, those who cluster around our own hearth, whose laugh rings out under our own roof tree, whom we can make happy? Are there no little children who have not the advantages that our own enjoy with whom we can share what we have on this day? Yes. And is that all?

Are there no others of larger growth to whom we may extend the gentle feeling of the sweetest day of the year? Are there no ranking differences that we may compose? No ancient enmities that we can slake in kindness? No jagged breaks that we can knit together? No lives riven asunder, no lovers parted, no friends severed, that we can help to make one again?

Can we not begin on this Christmas Day that "Truce of God," which shall banish all that is selfish, mean, narrow and ignoble; which shall pave the way for that profound alliance between men and men which is yet but a dream, a hope? Shall there not be inaugurated a brotherhood as eternal as the message, as overwhelming as the revelation?

Men and the world have mightily advanced in nineteen hundred years since those angels sang that morning. And we shall continue to advance while creation endures. The law of life is upward. But we can make the advance faster, bring the desired end nearer, and so help the great consummation, if we will but try.

The world is full of discord. Arms in hand, nation confronts nation upon many far flung frontiers; combinations face combinations with war the watchword within many a natural border; power holds and oppresses those who would diminish it; aspiration grasps at opportunity; weakness assembles desperately striving, vain to enjoy that which it now repudiates. Private war is still waged. Men are beggared, women shamed, children cursed, in the present strife of trade, commerce, labor, capital, speculation, politics. The world is still unkind. There is need for a new proclamation of the old yet ever marvelous story. Peace on the earth, good-will to men to-day, to-morrow, forever!

"Every reform," said a great modern philosopher, "was once a private opinion." When the man who holds it has communicated it to another man so that it becomes his private opinion, the reform is ultimately assured; which is but another variation of the saying of that Child grown to manhood, "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them."

"Be kindly affectioned one to another" on Christmas Day, and on all the days that shall follow after. Let the proclamation of the herald angels find a resting place in your heart, and do you "give to the gracious message a host of tongues," so that not only the heavens, but the earth itself, will forever resound with the glad acclamation.

And this is the noblest hope for the happy Christmas morning!

To day from East to West
Hushed is the traffic's roar;
And kneeling nations, blest,
Incarnate love adore.
Spirit of Christmas, may we
see afar
Thy guiding star.

The Christmas Spirit
Thy star, which, as we slept,
The orient light renewed,
Shall teach us to accept
Our gifts with gratitude;
And we shall give, illumined by
thy light,
Our gifts aright.

The gifts of loom and field,
The gifts of heart and mind,
Shall, through thy spirit, yield
The peace we fain would find.
Fulfilled of thee, our hearts shall
cherish then
Good-will to men.

Carolyn Wells